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ABSTRACT

Data from recently published analyses of past youth training efforts, together with demonstration programs for dropouts just getting underway, provide some clear indications of directions that must be taken to effectively treat the needs of seriously-at-risk youth. Furthermore, data on trends in youth unemployment among dropouts show that long-range employment training investments will be less costly to the nation in terms of tax revenues, economic productivity, and welfare and criminal justice costs than allowing the problem to continue to worsen. But early reports on the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), including an in-depth look at Portland, Maine, suggest that effective, targeted training is not being provided to this group, despite Congress' intent to do so. Unless local private industry councils and government officials make greater use of what we now know about what works and does not work for training at-risk youth, JTPA will continue to fall far short of its service and performance goals for dropouts, and for youth in general. (Author/GC)

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JOB TRAINING PARTNERSHIP ACT AND DROPOUT YOUTH

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New Findings on What Works for School Dropouts

Youngsters who have dropped out of school, or who are seriously at risk of doing so, are targeted for special attention under the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). Yet early evidence suggests that this group of young people continues to be seriously underserved despite convincing evidence that dropping out of school produces severe negative impacts in terms of chronic joblessness and reduced income. What makes this inadequacy even harder to understand is that there is a growing body of information about what types of remediation and training can be effective in meeting the needs of high-risk youth—information that is not being adequately used.

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What the Data Shows

Several recent studies and reports pull together in convincing and readable fashion some of the basic facts about the job training needs of dropout youth, and about the programs that work most effectively in meeting these needs. They include:

- The *CETA Youth Employment Record*, by Andrew B. Hahn and Robert Lerman of Brandeis University's Center for Employment and Income Studies;
- *Lessons from a Job Guarantee: the Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Projects (YIEPP)*, by Judith Gueron of the Manpower Demonstration Research Corp.;
- *A Practitioner's Guide: Strategies, Programs, and Resources for Youth Employability Development*, issued by Public/Private Ventures, Inc.;
- *Lessons from Youth Programs*, a series of monographs by Erik Butler and Garth Mangum, issued by the Center for Public Service at Brandeis University;
- *Becoming Partners: How Schools and Companies Meet Mutual Needs*, and *Partnerships Between Corporations and Schools*, twin reports of the National Commission for Employment Policy;
- *Investing in America's Future*, issued by the National Council on Employment Policy;
- *School-to-Work Transition Programs: A Policy Analysis*, prepared by the Hudson Institute; and
- *The Cost of Doing Nothing*, issued by Interface, a non-profit research and training group in New York City.

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Monday, August 13, 1984

Short reviews of the content and contributions of the most recent of these reports can be found in the Publications section of this and earlier issues of *Jobs Watch Alert*. Taken together, they paint a compelling and insightful picture of the dimensions of youth unemployment, and what we have learned from previous efforts to help remedy the problem.

Among the most important findings confirmed by all these studies are the facts that youth unemployment:

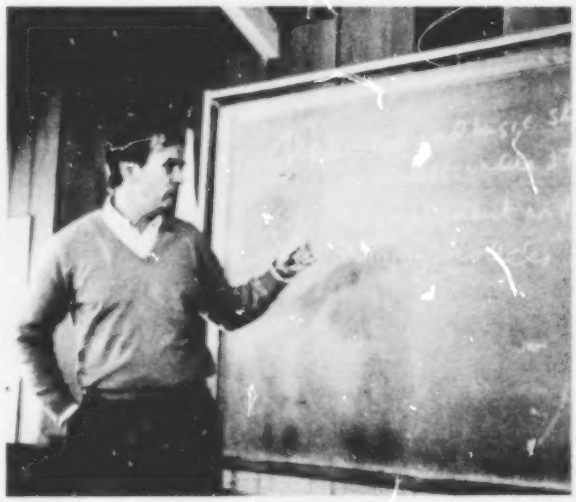
- has been rising sharply over the last several years—far more sharply than the adult jobless rate;
- is especially concentrated for dropouts, blacks and Hispanics; and
- begins a pattern of joblessness and lower earnings that persists and is accentuated throughout a person's life—young people with serious labor market difficulties do not "age out" of their problems.

These patterns are especially troublesome for dropouts, who suffer the highest unemployment rates and the lowest earnings throughout their lives. They also are very costly for society as a whole, in addition to causing difficulties for the affected youngsters. Chronic joblessness and reduced earnings translate into heavier economic burdens for all citizens because of lower tax revenues, lost economic productivity, and higher welfare and criminal justice costs.

What this means, in terms of the national economy, is that it will be *less costly* in the long-run to make the types of long-term training investments in dropouts and other at-risk youth that are most likely to produce positive results, than to continue to permit the problem to fester and grow. This is especially true now that we have the information and research findings that can point us in the direction of the most effective project approaches and interventions.

Dimensions of the Problem

The relationship between dropping out of school and chronically high unemployment is well established. Andrew Sum of Northeastern University has examined data for youth going back two decades and found that conditions for dropouts have actually gotten worse, not better. For example, in the period 1965-69, 68% of all high school graduates who did not go to college held jobs, while just 52.5% of dropouts were employed, a difference of almost 23%. In the early 1980s, 65.1% of high school graduates were working but only 40.3% of dropouts enjoyed similar success, a difference of 38%.



Andrew Sum of Northeastern University reviews data showing the extent and seriousness of youth unemployment needs.

The experience of black youth was even worse. In the late 1960s, 53% of black high school graduates who were not in college had jobs as did 48% of the dropouts. In the 1980-82 period, only 32% of black graduates were working and just 16% of dropouts.

The disparity between graduates and dropouts is shown in virtually all indicators of employment success. Even those dropouts lucky enough to find a job tend to experience lower earnings and work at inferior jobs.

Despite this strong evidence of the chronic unemployment and underemployment spawned by quitting high school before graduation, Sum maintained that federal employment and training programs have always underserved the dropout population, a deficiency that apparently is not getting better under JTPA and, in fact, may be worse—despite JTPAs mandate to serve this group.

In the last three years of JTPA's predecessor, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), Sum found that despite the fact that 60% of all disadvantaged youth (those technically eligible for CETA) were dropouts, only 30% of the individuals receiving training under CETA adult programs and 12% of those in youth programs were dropouts. Under JTPA, early indications are that service delivery to dropouts, and to those still in school but at risk of dropping out has deteriorated still more.

The JTPA statute mandates that at least 40% of training funds be spent on young people between the ages of 16 and 21. Additional emphasis also was given by

Gary Walker, of Grinker, Walker and Associates, describes his JTPA study findings that show local PICs are not serving youth and dropouts effectively.

JTPA to the importance of serving dropouts in language that requires them to be served at least in proportion to their incidence in the low-income population eligible for JTPA assistance.

Gary Walker, one of the directors of a large-scale independent evaluation of JTPA, told a July 25 conference of the National Council of La Raza that the service delivery areas (SDAs) surveyed for his study have, on average, allocated only 26% of their training funds to youth. He also charged that most SDAs in the survey were not developing special programs designed for dropouts—as mandated by JTPA—but were instead meeting the statutory quota by "counting the dropouts who happen to be participating in regular JTPA programs. Even using that shortcut, the SDAs are not reaching the required percentage of dropouts."

What Approaches Work Best

In addition to the data coming in on the nature and extent of the youth unemployment problem, there is also substantially more information available on effective remedies. Erik Butler, director of Brandeis University's Center for Public Service, has made an effort to synthesize the research findings identifying the most effective program approaches into a simplified set of "lessons from experience." Summary conclusions he highlighted at a recent training meeting for youth project administrators included the following:

Longer-term projects produce more lasting results. Short-term efforts, such as the highly touted job club-type projects that concentrate exclusively on a brief, intensive period of pre-employment counselling, may yield striking placement ratios in the short-term, but these positive results tend to evaporate after 6 to 18 months.

A combination of training and academic assistance works best. Work experience, or any other form of intervention, when done separately, does not adequately meet the broad range of needs presented by dropouts and other at-risk youth, and therefore has limited effectiveness. The best long-term gains come from programs that provide a comprehensive variety of assistance interventions and training approaches.

The academic factor is critical. Training in basic academic skills, especially for dropouts or likely dropouts, is essential. Academic remediation, when combined as part of a comprehensive system of academic and skill training, is the single factor most likely to reduce joblessness and increase earnings potential over a person's lifetime. Making academic remediation (not necessarily in the school) a condition for the receipt of training and job placement assistance is an especially effective approach.

Erik Butler of Brandeis University outlines what types of program approaches are most and least effective for training youth and dropouts.

The process must be individualized. Self-paced training is more expensive, but it produces substantial payoffs. Use of computer-assisted approaches improves the results even more dramatically. The goal is to allow participants to improve their skill levels progressively, at their own pace.

The most effective programs are based upon a collaborative effort. Establishing a collaborative relationship among schools, job trainers and private employers should be the first step taken in developing training programs.

Additional insights are provided in a new study just released by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), evaluating the impacts of the Youth Incentive Entitlement Pilot Project (YIEPP), an experimental program under the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act. Judith Gueron, MDRC's Vice President, summarized the results of their analysis in the report, *Lessons from a Job Guarantee*, drawing on the more detailed study, *Post-Program Impacts of YIEPP*, prepared with ABT Associates, Inc.

MDRC reports that YIEPP, part of the nation's largest effort to date to test various approaches for solving the unemployment problems of seriously at-risk youngsters, produced some important findings. First, during its brief life (Feb., 1978 to Aug., 1980) YIEPP showed conclusively that the abnormally high unemployment rates for high risk youth, particularly black youth, was not caused by lack of motivation, but by a severe inadequacy in available job opportunities. In the communities where YIEPP generated a major new source of jobs, jobless rates among the most seriously at-risk youngsters declined significantly, substantially reducing or wiping out the major gaps in unemployment rates that normally exist between black and Hispanic youth, and others who are not from economically disadvantaged groups. The lesson to be learned, according to MDRC's reports, is that one vital need is to expand job opportunities made available to at-risk youth through carefully targeted efforts.

Perhaps even more important, MDRC found that YIEPP's assistance produced long-term payoffs for the less advantaged—the program's positive impacts did not dissipate quickly. Youngsters who participated increased both their likelihood of remaining employed, and the amount of their earnings, during a post-participation period of up to 18 months. These continuing improvements represented significant gains when measured against the bleaker economic prospects of non-participants during the same period.

"Before the study," the MDRC report concluded, "the appropriate response to the growing gap between black and white youth employment rates was unclear. Would targeted job creation make a difference? Could adequate jobs be found? Would the youths take them? We now have convincing evidence that the employment deficit is not of the youths' making. The shortage is jobs, not motivation." Consequently, the report concludes, we now know a great deal more about how "to reverse . . . the deteriorating employment situation facing most poor youths." (Contact Judith Gueron at MDRC, 3 Park Avenue, New York City 10016, 212/532-3200.)

Some Effective Models

Three new demonstration programs have just been launched on a national basis that provide positive models on how the needs of dropout and seriously at-risk youth can be dealt with effectively. All three were carefully planned to include the types of assistance activities for dropout youth that were identified as most useful by recently released research findings. These models, and the newly released research findings on which they are based, provide the SDAs and their policymaking bodies, the private industry councils (PICs), with a range of program options of proven worth that can be used to bring their JTPA allocations for youth and dropouts up to statutory standards in an effective way. Whether the PICs choose to make use of these research findings, and to emulate the demonstration projects, will go a long way toward determining if JTPA will accomplish its stated goal of reaching and effectively serving dropout youth.

The major new national initiatives for dropout youth are:

- JOBSTART, a program of the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation of New York City;
- the Academies (school within a school) program, administered by local offices of the National Urban League and other community groups; and
- STEP (Summer Training and Education Program), operated by Public/Private Ventures of Philadelphia.

Notably, all three draw heavily upon the recent impact analyses and research findings that Butler used as a basis for his "lessons" summary. What should be borne in mind is that there is no "one way" for these findings

and recommended actions to be put into effect—no one model project or program that is best suited to every community's needs. Instead, each jurisdiction can choose those elements from the available models that are best suited to its own conditions and preferences.

While all three national demonstration programs emphasize several common elements, notably their comprehensive treatment of training and academic needs, there also are some important differences in approach.

JOBSTART

JOBSTART will test a variety of training strategies for dropout youth, age 18 to 21, at five sites (Pittsburgh, Pa.; San Jose, Calif.; Boston, Mass.; and two in New York City). Additional projects will be developed in other locations drawing on the results obtained from the initial pilots. The program is operated by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corp., with sponsorship by a consortium of private foundations, including Ford, Rockefeller and C.S. Mott.

The demonstration was begun out of the recognition that program efforts specifically targeted to dropout youth were too few, and that many of those that did exist were not producing effective results. "The main hypothesis for the demonstration," explained Robert Ivry, MDRC's vice-president for operations, "grew out of the realization that most existing programs tend to concentrate on only one aspect of dropout needs—usually preemployment counselling or job search aimed at getting youngsters placed quickly with the limited skills they already had. These single component programs have been shown to lose their impact over the longer period. Our pilots are designed to examine a variety of ways for providing a more comprehensive and longer lasting treatment. We will look at several top-rated projects for dropouts to see which elements and which combinations work best. We picked five programs that have shown themselves to be quality operations, each with a slightly different approach or emphasis. We hope to come up with a model, drawing on their best features, that can be suggested for wider use."

Center for Employment Training—One of the sites for MDRC's JOBSTART demonstration will be the Center for Employment Training (CET), located in San Jose, Calif. There are a number of characteristics about CET's efforts that distinguish this program from most other training initiatives, and help to explain its selection by MDRC as a model program for dropout youth.

Robert Johnston (left), CET's planning director (pictured with Carlos Lopez, director of operations), explains the program's unique approach to training dropouts and other high-risk groups.

CET serves an especially disadvantaged population—60% are high school dropouts, 30% have only limited English language ability, many of them are farmworkers, and 35% percent are youth. A key objective of the program is to provide these participants with more substantive types of remediation and assistance that will deal with deep-seated problems and produce lasting improvements in the long-run. As Robert Johnston, CET's director of planning and evaluation put it, "We take people where they are, whether youth, ex-offenders or non-English speakers, and do whatever is necessary to make them job-ready. Because it's such a diverse group, the training has to be competency based. That means each participant goes at their own pace, for as long as it takes to obtain the necessary skills."

This competency-based, time-variable approach, despite its proven effectiveness, is becoming more rare, rather than the rule, under the JTPA system, where a premium is placed on faster completion rates, and there-

fore on less complicated forms of training that cater to more job-ready individuals. This makes it harder to focus on CET's type of clientele—those, as Johnston described it, "Who have been by-passed by the educational or economic systems, or both. We see ourselves as a catch-up system, helping those with more, instead of less serious needs."

CET's approach to the youth training portion of its program is equally creative. "Most of the dropout youth we deal with," Johnston explained, "are trying to function economically as adults in the sense of being self-sufficient. Half of them have dependents, many are single heads of households. So we have to treat them on their own terms, and gear their training to the real job market and to an adult environment. At the same time we are aware that the best type of help we can give them, the help that will make the most difference long-term, means reinserting them into the academic system in some way. It's a goal and burden we welcome instead of shunning.

"We face a special problem dealing with dropout youth in California. The state requires you to be 18 to get a work permit, or to be in school. That leaves a Catch-22 situation for dropouts who are not yet 18. So we had to set up a system of alternative education, where kids could get high school credit for 10 hours a week of academic classes that would go along with their skill training. This was done right here at the training site, so there was less of a problem of requiring kids to physically return to the school building, something many of them would not do. All of our dropout youth are encouraged to take GED (high school graduate equivalency) exams, or to participate in some sort of educational program."

The MDRC JOBSTART demonstration that will be operated by CET will build upon this basic concept of merging training and academic remediation for dropouts in an alternative (out of school) setting. "The marriage between MDRC and ourselves," explained Johnston, "comes from the recognition that short-term training, by itself, is not productive for dropouts. There has to be some academic remediation too. So our special interest, and what will be examined by MDRC, is to find out if we can successfully make dropouts more receptive to educational components as part of an overall job training effort." (Contact Robert Ivry, MDRC, 3 Park Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016, 212/532-3200.)

Dropout youth receive a combined program of skill training and academic remediation at CET's training center in San Jose, Calif., stressing individualized, open-ended, and competency based instruction.

The Academies Program

The Academies Program builds on the same concept stressed by CET—that academic remediation, as a part of job training, is the single element most likely to improve the long-term employability and earnings of dropouts. But it does this in a different way—by creating a school-within-a-school that seeks to provide job skill training and work experience to youngsters who are seriously at-risk of dropping out, as a means of keeping them in school and preventing problems at the source. The Academies also stress extensive collaboration between the schools, businesses and job trainers, in order to produce an effective mix of academic and workplace activities that will keep students interested and involved.

Academies projects already are operating in Palo Alto, Calif., and Philadelphia, with two new sites scheduled to begin operation this fall in Portland, Ore., and Pittsburgh, Pa. At each site, a local chapter of the Urban League serves as coordinator and administrator for the project, which is funded by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation.

Alice Carter, of the Pittsburgh Urban League, represents one of the local Urban League chapters that are sponsoring Academies programs to reduce the dropout and youth unemployment rates in inner-city schools.

Each of the new sites will target assistance to 40-60 students in the second through fourth year of high school who face a strong likelihood of having to leave school. Trainers from industry and business (sometimes called "mentors"), working closely with the school, will develop and offer skill training classes keyed to jobs actually needed by the corporate community. They also will help arrange job placements and worksite orientations for students and teachers.

In each city, a school (or schools) with an especially high dropout rate, and a student body that is considered to have the most serious academic and economic problems, is chosen as the location for the in-school academy.

The oldest of the existing programs, the Peninsula Academies in Palo Alto, now covers two high schools and assists 180 youngsters each year. Students mix six hours of regular academics with four hours of Academy training in the 10th and 11th grades, going down to one hour of Academy work in the 12th grade. According to Charles Dayton, one of the coordinators, "We started out with a core of only six to eight employers who were able to make a serious commitment of time and effort to the project. Now we have 39 employers participating."

Because the Academies have been operating longest of the three new national demonstrations for dropouts, it has had more opportunity to experience and explore some of the critical problems that are bound to arise in organizing and operating a project that calls for extensive collaboration with the private sector.

Key issues that have arisen in Palo Alto are:

- getting state approval and educational certification of the Academies' curriculum;
- reaching a workable mix of vocational training and academics that will hold the students' interest;
- dealing with competitive feelings that may develop between regular teachers and Academies' trainers and counsellors working in the same schools;
- keeping regular teachers up to current state-of-the-art skills needed by the business community; and
- obtaining commitments from employers for the time required to develop curriculum, teach classes, and help place participants.

Beverly Parks, one of the Peninsula Academies instructors summed up the various elements that have to be brought together to make the Academies concept work. "It is critical," she said, "to keep the activities of the program closely tied to industry needs. But this has to

Beverly Parks, an in-school instructor with the Palo Alto, Calif., Academies program, explains how the collaborative effort between the community's educational system, businesses and job trainers was organized.

be done in a way that is relevant and interesting for the students, and acceptable to the schools."

Leslie Hurdy, another in-school Academies' instructor described it in a slightly different way. "There's a misconception," she explained, "almost a mystique about the business world that exists in the schools. This program helps students and teachers see industry as it really is, and gives the schools a better means for doing something about it. We are trying to develop a climate where business people can learn to be more concerned about young people, while becoming more involved in an academic process that will help insure that the youth will do well." (Contact Robyn Govan-Kleckley, Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, 250 Park Ave., New York City 10017, 212/986-7050.)

Summer Training and Education Program (STEP)

STEP, the third new national demonstration program for dropouts, is operated by Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) with the sponsorship of the Ford Foundation. It is similar to the Academies in that it seeks to catch seriously at-risk youngsters while they are still in school and before they become dropouts. But it is targeted to younger students, 14 to 15 years old, who are performing poorly in school, on the theory that this is a particularly vulnerable point in their academic life. Carol Thomson, P/PV's public affairs director, stressed one key concept of STEP—"The earlier you can deal with problems that require remediation the better."

Another similarity between STEP, the Academies and JOBSTART is their effort to tie academic remediation into job skill training activities. In STEP's case, youngsters spend half their day in the classroom strengthening basic academic skills, and the other half on the job.

One major difference between STEP and the other new demonstration programs for dropouts is that it focuses on the summer months, and uses summer jobs as the peg for getting youngsters interested in related academic training efforts. However, some follow-up support activities are planned during the school year to help participants retain their academic proficiencies and interest.

STEP will begin this summer at three sites—Boston, Baltimore and Pinellas County, Florida, and expand to six locations serving about 3,000 youth over a two year period. "We are paying special attention in selecting the sites," explained Thomson, "to such factors as the quality of the work experiences that are provided, and the presence of a sound, competency-based academic remediation program. It's especially hard to find good remediation systems suited to 14 and 15 year olds. In Boston's case, we were able to get seven local community colleges to provide both the summer work slots and the academic training courses at the same locations."

One goal of the STEP initiative that P/PV finds particularly important is, according to Thomson, "To open up new job opportunities for 9th and 10th graders that would never be there because they are usually too young to compete for work, particularly where the jobs involve skills they do not yet have."

Even though STEP projects are not usually based in the public schools (Baltimore is one exception), P/PV recognizes the importance of improving coordination between the schools, employers and job trainers along the lines followed by both the JOBSTART and Academies programs. But instead of doing this directly as part of the program, as the other two demonstrations seek to do, P/PV has developed a separate demonstration program specifically aimed at promoting collaboration, called State Employment Initiatives for Youth (SEIY). It has begun operation on a pilot basis in Massachusetts, Oregon and South Carolina.

SEIY seeks to improve organizational ties at the state level, in hopes that these state-wide linkages will produce better coordination and delivery of education and training services in local communities. While state level coordination may appear several steps removed from the immediate coordination needs faced locally, it represents a useful addition to the collaborative approach that has become a cornerstone of most serious efforts to deal with the training and employment needs of at-risk youth. (Contact Thomas Smith or Carol Thomson, P/PV, 399 Market Street, Philadelphia, Pa. 19106, 215/592-9099.)

Conclusion—Applying What We Know to JTPA

Several new factors recently have appeared on the scene that give some hope of reversing a longstanding tendency to overlook the special employment and training needs presented by dropouts and at-risk youth.

• The problems of dropouts have worsened to the point that they no longer can be easily ignored.

• We now know a great deal more than we did during the days of CETA about what works and does not work effectively for dealing with the special needs of this group.

• Some model programs have been developed that point the way on how newly available information and research on dropout needs can be put to effective use.

• JTPA, at least on paper, provides a basis for targeting additional training efforts for dropouts and youth.

The burden is now on the SDAs and the PICs to increase and upgrade their JTPA allocations with special projects targeted to youth and dropout needs. This will mean reversing the apparent trend to meet the statutory targeting mandate simply by counting the youth and dropouts that participate in other training programs geared to the general population. More focused, early interventions along the lines of the new national demonstrations such as JOBSTART, the Academies, and STEP, will have to be developed and funded by the PICs if we are to make headway against the pathology of chronic unemployment that begins when students leave high school prematurely. **JWA**

A Case Study of Portland, Maine

Portland (Cumberland County), Maine, presents a revealing case study of what appears to be a major deficiency in the Jobs Training Partnership Act's (JTPA's) ability to reach and serve at-risk and dropout youth. John Fitzsimmons, staff director of the Cumberland County private industry council (PIC), maintains that youth and dropouts are participating in JTPA projects close to the percentages required by the statute (36% for youth; 26%, or proportionally to their representation in the overall eligible population, for dropouts). But government officials and community representatives involved with training programs claim these figures are misleading, and that area youth and dropouts actually are not being served effectively.

The explanation for this apparent inconsistency is that the Cumberland County PIC takes the approach that targeting requirements for youth and dropouts can be adequately met by serving these groups as part of the regular training programs offered to the JTPA-eligible population as a whole. As Fitzsimmons explained it, "Youth are not separately dealt with. They are interspersed throughout the courses we provide. There are no separate programs for them with the exception of one small project for dropouts run by the city's Youth Opportunities Office."

Gary Walker of Grinker, Walker and Associates, and other independent research groups that have been evaluating JTPA implementation and impact, confirm that most jurisdictions are taking this same approach. But they do not share Fitzsimmons' view that it is necessarily producing effective training results for youth. Walker, for example, cites his survey finding that, because of the lack of programs with more direct targeting for youth, the jurisdictions he reviewed are allocating only 26% of their JTPA funds for youth compared with 40% required by the statute.

Portland Officials Doubt JTPA's Impact on Youth

City officials in Portland also voice concern about whether Fitzsimmons' approach is working adequately for youth. Shirley Morgan, director of the city's Youth

Shirley Morgan, director of Portland's Youth Opportunities Office, rejects the view that at-risk youth are adequately served in programs aimed at the general JTPA population.

Opportunities Office, which runs the one area youth project receiving JTPA funds, echos Walker's view that dropout and other troubled youth can not be served effectively under general training programs. "Most of the kids we work with," she explained, "all of whom are dropouts, are not even able to participate in summer youth programs, much less straight skill training. They need special counseling. It takes a lot of patience to work with them. This can't happen in training centers catering to the general population. These youngsters need a lot more that is not part of most training programs right now."

"What they need," she emphasized, "is a progressive system, and a longer process specifically designed for their individual needs. You need to give them some basic ideas about jobs and some basic services before you can put them into regular training. It takes longer to do it this way, but it makes a big difference in their future ability to hold down jobs."

As a case in point, Morgan cites the policy imposed on them by Fitzsimmons' agency, the Training Resource Center (TRC), the primary contractor for the area PIC. TRC mandated in its subcontract with the Youth Opportunities Office that the agency deal strictly with dropouts, and not try to work with the schools in any way to try to prevent the problems causing a high dropout rate. Morgan had proposed that some remedial work for potential dropouts be included in her contract, but the idea was rejected.

The result of not setting up special programs for youth, and not making academic remediation part of the JTPA effort, Morgan said, is that many dropouts and at-risk youngsters "are falling between the cracks," despite the seemingly acceptable statistics cited by Fitzsimmons. "Youth Opportunities has referred kids who have completed our project to the Training Resource Center for enrollment in their more general training courses," Morgan said. "But many times they are referred right back to us. They are told they don't qualify."

One reason this happens, Morgan speculated, is that "the regular TRC training course requirements far exceed what most dropouts and disadvantaged youngsters can meet. They need help in literacy and basic work habits before they can make use of training in specific job skills." The regular TRC programs do not meet these needs, she said, "because the people at TRC and the PIC may not understand clearly enough what youth unemployment problems and needs are all about."

Youth Opportunities provided a variety of pre-employment counselling services to 54 dropout youth during the last six months of fiscal year 1984, on a budget that included $49,000 in JTPA funds. As the only program funded by JTPA specifically targeted to youth in the area, that means that only 5% of JTPA dollars were directly earmarked for youth projects last year. City officials in Portland, including Morgan, suggested that even this modest targeting effort was in jeopardy, because TRC had given some initial indications that future funding for Youth Opportunities was in doubt, and was in the process of being "reevaluated."

Morgan is not the only Portland official expressing criticism of the PIC and TRC policies, as well as doubts that area youth and dropouts are being adequately served under JTPA. Terry Ann Lunt heads the city's Department of Health and Human Services. "Thirty-six percent of all our general assistance (welfare) people are under 30," she said, "and the largest percentage of those are between 18 and 22 years old. That's a huge number. But TRC's JTPA programs are doing almost nothing for them because they face multiple barriers to employment. They have poor health, substance abuse problems, are functionally illiterate, and lack work histories. It's not just a matter of not having a high school diploma or GED. They are reading at a fourth grade level or less. So TRC's JTPA programs are useless to them. They're designed for people who can read and use machines. Of course they're turned away! These are kids who are high-risk, kids who have failed at other things. They need the types of services and assistance that the regular TRC programs can't give them."

One reason why TRC's JTPA programs have not been designed to reach the higher-risk youngsters and adults, according to Lunt, is that "they have been experiencing a lot of staff cutbacks. So instead of contracting out programs they are doing more of it themselves as a way to keep the staff intact. The problem is, they're not trained and capable of doing a lot of the more complex and difficult training tasks."

"We tried to get them to take a more targeted, comprehensive approach to youth training," she said, "but they wouldn't do it. They finally did agree to take more kids from the general assistance population, and to allocate at least 5% of JTPA training funds for GA recipients in general. But they haven't even been able to reach these goals because they are not equipped, and are not really interested, in serving high-risk people."

Nor does Lunt believe that the present economic upturn will relieve the problem. "The upturn," she said, "is not reaching the people with multiple barriers to employment. The jobless rate has gone down on average, but our general assistance population has tripled in just the past year and a half. Part of the reason is that the jobs that are opening up are not the ones the higher risk people can fill. They require greater skill levels. Another is that young people had a harder time developing work histories during the recession because of the lack of jobs, and that makes them less attractive, and less employable now. Being without work during that time also had some severe impacts in terms of damaged self-esteem. It caused unprecedented substance abuse problems that have carryover effects on employability."

All these factors are good reasons, Lunt said, why JTPA should be doing more for this group of people. "JTPA was designed especially for these structurally unemployed people, and for at-risk youth," she reasoned, "but it is not being used that way either for adults or youth here in Portland!"

Portland West's Program Provides a Model

Another indicator that the Cumberland County PIC is having problems in serving youth under JTPA is the fact that Portland does have a highly innovative, privately funded program for high-risk youth (operated by the Portland West Neighborhood Planning Council) that has been entirely excluded from the JTPA system. Fitzsimmons believes there are good political and performance-related reasons why the Portland West program has not received JTPA funds. He contends that Portland West, in operating youth training projects in the past, has not maintained documented reports on how participants have fared. He, and other Portland officials, also said there is a long history of public disputes with Portland West that makes it more difficult, as a practical and political matter, for the organization to be willingly accepted as a contractor by agencies it has openly fought with in the past.

But even if there are reasons why Portland West itself might not be funded, the fact remains that its youth training projects do provide useful examples of the type of assistance approach that is more likely to meet the specific training needs of at-risk youngsters—examples that have not been followed thus far by the PIC.

The Portland West Neighborhood Planning Council for many years has enjoyed a reputation as a highly effective advocate and operator of programs for training troubled youth. Since its founding as the Youth in Action Program in 1967, it has brought counseling, job training and educational assistance to well over 3,000 young people in a Portland community with an extremely high concentration of youth who have dropped out of school, experienced serious substance abuse problems, or run into problems with the criminal justice system. The majority of youth served have been white, reflecting the demography of the state.

James Oliver, the director of Portland West, who helped found the program with Bruce Reeves (a former state senator) and Lawrence Connolly (presently a state representative) is justifiably proud of what has been accomplished. "If you walk around this neighborhood," he said, "almost every young person you see has been in one or another of our programs. Eighty percent of them are still working in the trades we trained them for. Just as important, we have provided services to troubled youth that no one else was willing or able to provide. Especially in the past few years, with the high unemployment and the severe cutbacks in social services, kids are coming in from the rural areas with no jobs and no

James Oliver, director of the Portland West Neighborhood Planning Council, seeks JPTA support for training programs more directly targeted to high risk youth.

training, desperate for help. There's been a real economic revival going on in Portland. But it hasn't reached these very poor kids."

Take the Bath Iron Works renovations, for example," he said. "They received $30 million from the state and city governments for modernization and job development to curb the layoff problem. But they did not create one single job for kids. It was only through a good deal of local advocacy that we were able to get at least a promise from the city (still not implemented) to make a training program for low-income youth a priority once the laid off workers have all been helped."

It was the same type of forceful advocacy by Portland West that, despite strong opposition from city and county officials, resulted in several other successful initiatives for dropout youth, including the establishment of a neighborhood branch of the community college to provide remedial education, the purchase and renovation of a large number of run-down buildings that generated an ideal training ground for construction trade skills, and the establishment of a variety of drug treatment, educational and employment training projects.

Given Portland West's track record with youth and dropouts, some of their training programs, particularly the new Youth Jobs in Portland Harbor project, would seem to be reasonable candidates for JTPA funding, or at least for emulation by the PIC. The Harbor Project for example, aims to provide 25 troubled youth, most of them dropouts with criminal or drug problems, with six months of on-the-job training in a variety of maritime skills, in the hope of opening opportunities for them in an area of major economic expansion in the community. The first set of five youngsters began training on July 30.

Participants in the project begin by learning boat fitting and maintenance skills through hands-on restoration of a 45 year-old World War II liberty ship, owned by Portland West and drydocked at the nearby Coast Guard base. An extensive effort also is being made to place the youngsters with several local maritime employers for brief orientation and training periods in a variety of harbor related skills. Jobs in fish cutting and processing, net and equipment repair, and on-board work on cruise and trip-fishing boats are among the job skills that are being offered. Lawrence Connolly, assistant director of the Harbor Project, has been lining up training and job placements with harbor employers. "Most of them have been very responsive," he said. "I see a tremendous potential here, as the waterfront gets on with its revitalization, that the regular training centers just haven't been adequately tapping for youth."

Participants in Portland West's Youth Jobs in Portland Harbor project learn boat maintenance skills while refurbishing a World War II liberty ship.

Reaching the Hardest to Serve

Although Portland West's past youth training efforts have been criticized by some government officials (lack of records and documented follow-up on participants are cited), they are nevertheless the one program in the area, and one of the few nationwide, that aggressively seeks out high-risk youth, and designs projects that keep them motivated and involved. A profile on some of the participants of the Harbor Project provides a graphic indication of who is served, and the approach Portland West is trying to take.

Kelly is part of the first group training at the liberty ship worksite. "I was deep into drugs," he explained. "This is the first legit job I've had, and its also the first time I feel like I want to work. This is something I want to do."

"I get rent aid from the city and food stamps, but you can't live on that. You need some cash money to pay for

laundry and soap and such. So I have two choices, since no employer will take a chance on me—either cashing in food stamps, or stealing TV sets. This training program beats the heck out of stealing."

Leroy, another Harbor Project participant, has a felony conviction that locks him out from employment. "I'm always put at the bottom of the list," he said, "as soon as I mention that I have a record. I've had one job in four years, and that one was little more than doing lawnwork. There just ain't no program I could get into except for this one."

Despite being the only program serving this group of high-risk youngsters, Portland West and its Harbor Project have been, in the words of Oliver, "completely locked out of JTPA." Efforts to become members of the PIC were rebuffed. A proposal to operate a summer youth project was rejected. Requests for nonfinancial assistance from the PIC, such as technical and back-up support, have not produced results.

Oliver sites a number of factors that have contributed to these denials. "Many of the officials making the JTPA decisions," he noted, "are the same ones we have been carrying on a running battle with since CETA days, trying to get more attention for youth needs." He does not believe these officials have taken kindly to these past confrontations, many of them well publicized in the media.

The makeup of the new PIC under JTPA also is a contributing problem in Oliver's view. Few are informed on youth and training issues, and most are easily turned off by the type of participant Portland West seeks out. "These kids' problems and needs are complex, so the programs we run have to be designed to cover a fairly wide-range of services, and to be individualized in approach. But unfortunately," Oliver continued, "these methods do not always sit well with the more traditional views of PIC members and program operators who are seeking shorter, less expensive treatment, focused on only one aspect of job training."

These are major causes, Oliver believes, why the government, even under CETA, has been largely unresponsive to youth and dropout needs. "These are rough kids, facing rough problems," Oliver said, "and government is reluctant to put in the time and money required to help them. When it does try, it is put off by the language the kids use and the problems they face. We went through a big controversy that was played up in the press where they tried to discredit our work by claiming some of the kids smoked pot and were ex-cons. That's exactly why we have these kids in the program. But its just hard for the traditional establishment to accept and work with this type of youngster."

Portland West has had experiences that mirror those of the city's Youth Opportunities Office when it has tried to send graduates of its programs to the more traditional projects run under JTPA by TRC. "We send them down," Harbor Project director Susan Hirsch explained, "and they are just turned away and told they can't be accepted in job training because they are not job-ready—they don't have the necessary skills. That's totally illogical. Isn't that the whole idea—to get to kids who are not job ready, not those who already are?"

"The kids they are serving now are not the hard-core poor, highly troubled youngsters that need help the most," Oliver continued. "Most of them have some job skills. They are unemployed, so they do meet the low-income eligibility criteria at the moment. But they are not the more severely disadvantaged youngsters who tend to be excluded and overlooked by the system on an ongoing basis. They deserve assistance too, but they probably would get jobs on their own, whereas JTPA, and CETA before it, is supposed to be targeted to those facing more serious barriers to placement."

Fish cutting and processing are some of the jobs covered by Portland West's program to train at-risk youth for employment in the maritime trades.

Another indicator of this problem, commonly called "creaming," has been the state's decision to deny needs-based payments or stipends to any participants receiving more than $75 per week in any other assistance program. Portland West unsuccessfully protested this policy, pointing out JPTA's emphasis on serving the welfare population, and the fact that many recipients of food stamps, welfare and rent assistance payments would be excluded from training as a practical matter under these conditions because they could not cover the costs of participation out of their assistance checks.

One recipient of Aid to Families with Dependent Children was told she was entitled to a stipend as a trainee, and was paid $20 after her first week. "But when they found out she received an AFDC payment over the limit," complained Connolly, "they actually forced her to give the money back. She filed a legal complaint with the help of Pine Tree Legal Services."

Where Do Portland and JTPA Go from Here?

Portland West's outspoken criticisms of government policies, and its past history of confrontations with the PIC, make it understandable that their current youth programs would have some difficulty in being selected to receive funding under JTPA. But these political difficulties with Portland West do not justify the PIC's and TRC's reluctance to deal more affirmatively with youth needs through other means, including the city's own Youth Opportunities Office.

Health and Human Services Director Lunt is hopeful that new initiatives can be started with the PIC to produce more positive and effective results. She is hoping to convince TRC and the PIC to make more targeted JTPA allocations for at-risk youth and adults, in conjunction with state funded efforts along these lines that her Department is planning. If this effort succeeds, it will be exactly the kind of coordinated approach between the welfare and job training sectors that JTPA was designed to encourage.

But looking at it from the larger perspective, Portland's problems in serving the needs of dropout and at-risk youth under JTPA are not unique. A more general deficiency in the JTPA system appears to be developing—the tendency to overlook the hardest-to-serve youth, and to avoid the use of more comprehensive (and more effective) approaches to youth training needs because they tend to be more expensive and more time-consuming initially, despite the long-term benefits. Unless this tendency can be reversed, and local PICs can be encouraged to make better use of the lessons that have been learned from past youth training efforts, it will be hard to convince Congress and the public that JTPA, in its present form, is the proper vehicle for dealing with youth. Efforts to develop more targeted and comprehensive training programs specifically geared to the needs of high-risk youth will have to receive substantially more support from local PICs if JTPA is to be considered credible and effective.

The information that is needed to develop more effective programs, and the example of several valuable demonstration projects using training approaches of proven effectiveness, are now available. The question is whether these tools are going to be used adequately and effectively under JTPA. **JWA**